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PRIMITIVE PEOPLES OF MATTO GROSSO

An Account of Archaeological and Ethnological Field Work at the Headwaters of the Paraguay and Xingu Rivers in Matto Grosso, Brazil, During 1931

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THIS account of my field work in Matto Grosso, Brazil, during 1931, is offered to those interested in primitive peoples and especially in South American archaeology and ethnology, with the sole motive of making available source material. The paper is not intended as a critical study of the region with which it deals nor does it purport to be thorough in its treatment of the subjects that it discusses. To my critical readers I plead the fact that I was a novice in the South American field at the time that the material presented was gathered, and that I was among tribes that are either but slightly known or not at all, and that thus my difficulties were those to be met by the first workers. One handicap was lack of interpreters, limiting the field of my investigations to what was physically observable. However, it is intended that the paper give the fundamental setting of the cultures with which I came in contact for any analytical study that may be undertaken in the future.

The work was done under the auspices of the University Museum cooperating with the Matto Grosso Expedition and the Academy of Natural Sciences, whose representative was Mr. James A. G. Rehn.

Both archaeology and ethnology occupied my attention, my project being fundamentally in the nature of a survey of the possibilities that the country offers in both fields of research and to study the field conditions, rather than to bring back a conclusive and thorough study of some particular site or tribe. Though the unlooked-for acquisition of an amphibian airplane by the expedition aroused the hope that a prolonged stay with some tribe could be made, since the usual excessive amount of time spent in reaching the desired village could be saved by flying the distance in a few hours, the ultimate results were what had been originally planned for reasons that will appear in the narrative.

Briefly, my work included the locating of a number of archaeological sites and the partial excavation of two of them; visits to the Bororo da

people know a person by one name, some by another, depending on which name he was using at the time they had the closest contact with each other. Still another problem was the fact that the Bororo recognize as "fathers" all the men who had sexual relations with Ego's mother at the time of conception and during pregnancy. Two of my informants had been sons of the village's "wanton" or "female associate" (Crocker 1969b) and they had only two classes of relatives in the opposite moiety, i.e., fathers and father's sisters (grandmothers). Only slowly with greater knowledge of the context of each particular instance, did I start to see some pattern in the apparent confusion. The native criteria have been of help for some of the semantic rules employed in the analysis of the referential systems, but there is some variation in how people explain extensions of terms. Many people had their own theories, but none of these theories worked through the whole system. One woman, when asked in abstract about the classification of particular kin types, answered in terms of the moiety theory. She would count the connecting links, placing them with her finger in imaginary spaces of her own and the opposite moiety. Once the kin type was placed, she would say, "If he (she) is older than myself, then I will call him (her) ... so and so." Her system could not work in all cases, and she did not even call her own actual relatives according to it.

Another man had a different theory. According to him all the relatives traced through mother were called by the

*601 114 124 same term that she used for them, all those traced through father were divided in two groups according to sex. The informant again overgeneralized some particular rules. Mother and child had different terms for mother's father (iyoqwa and iyedaga respectively) except in the system of address where he was called iyoqwa by both. Female Ego and her mother will call mother's brother's daughter and son by the same terms (irago and iyagedu), but male Ego will call them itonaregedu. Of the terms traced through father, father's father and father's father's brother did not fit into my informant's theory, they were called iyedaga instead of iyoqwa.

Another informant used to construct sets of terms based on relative age, and to attribute these sets to various genealogical positions. The longest set he proposed was the following:

mother's sister younger than Ego:	iviye
mother's sister younger than mother:	ituye
mother's sister older than mother:	imuqa
mother's sister much older than mother:	imaruqo

This set also does not predict classification without error. ituye in addition to being younger than mother should also be older than Ego. Only the mother's sister who assumes all the mother's responsibilities in relation to Ego will be called imuqa. She can be older or younger than Ego's own mother. Finally, the only mother's sister who will be called imaruqo is the one who proposed Ego's name, regardless of her age.

The Bororo made all these errors in theoretically dis-

cussing how some kin-types should be designated, or the procedure of finding out how to designate it. In practice they made no mistakes, and they would explain any unusual applications of terms by some other system connected with death, naming, and so on. The native theories about how the system works have been of great help in the analysis of the Bororo referential system presented above, but I cannot say that the analysis is "psychologically valid."

613 also the older brother of Boroge (b), avoiding a direct answer
829 to the question. On the other hand, all the lineages from
[616] the same moiety are considered brothers, so when forced to give a straight answer the Bororo will say that they are brothers, appealing to the broadest sense of that term.

As we can imagine, this flexibility of interpretation—employing terms in either a narrow or a broad sense—gives the Bororo a great freedom to interpret the relationship between lineages as it best serves them in any given situation.
626 The difference of individual opinion is also great, and if a
[773] quarrel arises, the man who knows more mythical facts and
[181] ways to manipulate them will win the argument. But since the Bororo do not like to argue, there is an established unofficial hierarchy based on knowledge. The least knowledgeable, the one who is going to lose the argument, keeps his opinions to himself whenever a more knowledgeable man speaks.
● 124 The first thing I learned in the field was never to reveal the source of my information. Some of the Bororo would occasionally guess whose opinion it might be, but nevertheless they could not be completely sure if their suppositions were right or wrong. And, what was most important, my refusal to reveal my informant's name allowed the new informant to speak more freely because he was relieved of the fear that he too might be exposed to the criticism of the others.

551 The discussion at the beginning of this chapter illus-
613 trated the difficulty in distinguishing between personal names and lineage names. All the lineage names are also

613 list some names that nobody else did, we must suppose that their family tradition was a little different from the rest of the community. The placement of Koge (Enogwa) Tabowu is very interesting. Some included it among the Red Ivagududoge, others among the Black, and one said that it was neither Red nor Black, it was in between: boyadadawu. Thus, the members of this lineage can choose their ornaments and songs from either of the subclans.

I did the same kind of analysis for the other clans, and the result was the following list (Table X) of the most im- [124] portant Bororo lineages. It should be noted that no informant would give the same list, but the majority of them would include all of the lineages mentioned in the list.[1]

[128] [622] The order given to the lineages around the village circle (see table XI) follows the Bororo usage; and I started with Badajebage Chebegiwuge because this is the order followed by the chief in calling out clan members for the evening meeting on the village plaza. But when they talk about lineages or when they sing clan songs, the Bororo may start with whatever lineage or clan they prefer and then proceed either clockwise or counterclockwise until they have

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[115] [128] [1] When I concluded my analysis and made the list, I asked my wife, whose primary interest in the field had not been Bororo social organization, to tell me the names of the lineages she considered to be most important. She mentioned 24 of them, all included in the list, leaving out Kurugugwari Pijiwu and Aturua. This shows how much these important lineages are part of the Bororo daily talk.

613 827 The Bororo are very reluctant to talk about the ancestors of certain lineages because they are not proud to be the descendants of those ancestors. They are mentioned only in 124 quarrels as an insult. I was able to collect some of these 613 examples only by provoking one of my informants. He was from 827 the Kurugugwa lineage of the Apiborege clan, and I told him that there was a rumor that the true Kurugugwa had died long ago and the present members of the Kurugugwa lineage were just impostors. Furthermore, I said, the Bororo were saying that the Apiborege could not take care of one of their younger brothers, so the Ivagududoge (in which clan I was named) had had mercy upon him and accepted him as one of their own. My informant gave me his theory about what had really happened in this case and then went on to say that my own clan had a lot of things to hide. An example:

613 827 "Meri defecated on some stones. His feces changed into a goatsucker (mokureabo), nay, a true Ivagududoge. Therefore their (Ivagududoge's) mouths are big, and their heads are big. And the people say that their village lies on the rocks."

As we see from this example, alleged characteristics of people in the different clans are explained by relating them to traits of their animal ancestors. Another example:

[825] "People say that the Kiye originated from the monkeys; therefore their arms and legs are skinny; therefore their skin is black; their

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1 "Awu meri pegodure pariri keje. Ure nowu pore mokureabodo pudumi. Boe kimorema iya Ivagududoge rabode. Duwugere eya kurichigore, etaya boa kurichigore. Duwugere boe egore 'ewororo paduye pariri keje'."

/449 cont./

114 Duarte's representative, who received us with great kindness and cordiality, was the "Cadet" Eliseo Pinto d'Annunciação. In Brazil cadets are aspiring officers, usually sons of officials or officers, /450/ who rise from the ranks and whose advancement depends largely on protection. Our Eliseo had the rank of sergeant and thought he would promptly become lieutenant if I put in a good word for him in Rio. He was a good and conscientious man and would have been able to accomplish something useful if he had had the right to act according to his judgment. A second cadet with the rank of noncommissioned officer was called Caldas, a young man, musical, and, for additional pay, schoolmaster of the Bororó boys. He had also put together a vocabulary and was thus the representative of art and science. Then there was another cadet, Joaquim, the apothecary, and the administrator, Ildefonso. By far the most important individual for me, however, was Clemente, who had lived in Bororó captivity for 13 years and was now about 28 years old. His father, Manoel Pedroso de Alvarenga, lived on the Peixe de couro, a small tributary of the Piquiry emptying into the S.
721 Lourenço. In September 1873, the Bororó attacked five children who were bathing there; two were killed, one escaped, two were
727 taken along, Clemente and a younger brother. He said they tied their hands in front of their eyes and carried them to the village on their backs five days without stopping. His brother soon died.
124 In 1886 Clemente was freed by the Bororó. Meanwhile, however, he had become a Bororó himself. He not only went about in their dress with bow and arrow, he had not only forgotten almost all his Portuguese, but he had, as I learned to my advantage, experienced a purely Indian training in his thinking and knowledge. On the other hand, he had relearned enough of his mother tongue in the meantime to be able to assist me as a useful interpreter. Unfortunately, he left Thereza Christina before we did, because, he said, he "is learning nothing" there. The officers themselves did not know anything, he said. Near his home village there lives a man who can cure all the sick and open any lock.

/515 cont./

821 789 searchingly, squirted into their faces, pzũ pzũ, and, with the hollow of their hands held against their mouths, again uttered their threatening vóu or a shrill hahahó, not forgetting to smoke up their bundle as they did so. The chorus had in general remained grave and quiet; only now and then did it break out in a one-part huhá and now triumphantly repeated it at the end as the two doctors, teeth chattering and murmuring a shivery tédede tedéte, retired. Aróe singing was heard all night long.

[276] The tobacco smoke had been used here in exactly the same way as the puffing against the thunderstorm, and I gained the impression that the doctor's smoking was very similar to a fumigation. Perhaps, for the original meaning of the method of curing, this should not be underestimated.

755 Domingo had an attack of weakness two days after the meteor conjuration. On the third day, 17 April, he was ill and apparently had a very ominous feeling. He crept about anxiously, his hands tied up in rags and his head and face covered so that he would not be recognized. Since we left the colony on 18 April we were unfortunately unable to find out whether this remedy helped him.

773 Ancestor legend. Arigá-Bororó is the tribal ancestor of the Indians. He had a wife. The puma is called arigá. Later, two men and two women came /516/ to the earth east of the baruparu river (cf. page 646) and reached the S. Lourenço. I was unable [724] to learn anything more. Clemente was quite useless here; he himself did not know anything and, on the basis of his knowledge of Brazil, interpreted those statements as meaning that the Bororó came from Rio de Janeiro. As far as I was able to understand, the Bororó lived on the source rivers of the S. Lourenço since the time they left heaven, and this origin from the east has nothing to do with tribal migrations, but is again only the result of the very natural reflection that the sun was in the possession of the oldest people and that the oldest people therefore lived where the sun originates.